

Years after Anchorage police fatally shoot Black man, dashcam video prompts new questions

By

Casey Grove, Alaska Public Media - Anchorage

February 15, 2022

RELATED VIDEOS

IMAGES



Daisy Powerline 340 BB Repeater Pistol

A stock photo of a BB gun Anchorage police say Bishar Hassan had when he was shot and killed by Anchorage police on April 1, 2019. (Anchorage Police Department)

The fatal Anchorage police shooting of a Black man in 2019 is under renewed scrutiny after the public release of police dashcam footage by a lawyer representing the man's family in a wrongful death lawsuit.

Three Anchorage police officers shot and killed Bishar Hassan, a 31-year-old Somali American, on April 1, 2019 while investigating a report of a man with a gun walking into traffic.

A 2019 report from the Alaska Office of Special Prosecutions described the use of deadly force by officers Nathaniel Lewis, Brett Eggiman and Matthew Hall as necessary for their own protection. According to the report, Hassan walked toward the officers and pulled out what looked like a 9 mm handgun — later determined to be a BB gun — as the officers made contact with Hassan on A Street, just south of the city's downtown core.

The state prosecutor who reviewed the case and wrote the report declined to press charges against the officers.

But Hassan's family filed a wrongful death lawsuit two years later, in April of 2021, seeking \$20 million from the Municipality of Anchorage. Through their lawyer, the family has disputed police accounts and the report's findings.

More recently, the family's lawyer, Rex Butler, gave the video of the shooting to NBC News, after petitioning the police department and municipality for it. NBC's story published Thursday featured a shortened, nearly two-minute version of the video, which has spurred calls for a new investigation.

The video shows a quick, tense exchange. The officers yell at Hassan, who turns and walks toward them and pulls something from his waistband. Almost immediately, there's a flurry of gunshots, and Hassan falls to the ground. Hassan can be seen still moving on the ground, and the officers yell at him to roll to his stomach, which he does not do. According to NBC, about two minutes go by before anyone approaches Hassan to check his condition or render aid.

Butler said that after the NBC story was published, the city filed an injunction in court to block the video's release.

In an interview Friday, Butler said the police officers had no reason to have even stopped Hassan in the first place.

Butler's contention is that Hassan had not committed a crime prior to the encounter with police, and because Alaska has no law against carrying a concealed gun, the officers had no reason to stop him.

Butler said the video shows Hassan pulling out the BB gun with his palm up, hand open, to show it to the officers, in compliance with Alaska laws that he immediately notify them.

"In fact, he complied with it more than what he really had to," Butler said. "So he showed it to them, and for his compliance with the law, he got lit up."

Butler said Hassan's family wanted to release the dashcam video to the public ahead of a rally in Hassan's honor, and to bring attention to the disproportionate number of fatal police shootings of Black men. The rally is being organized by the Alaska Black Caucus and is set for April 1.

Among those calling for an independent and transparent investigation of Hassan's shooting is the Council on American-Islamic Relations, or CAIR. In a written statement, CAIR's National Deputy Director Edward Ahmed Mitchell, questioned the officers' decision to stop Hassan, as well as the roughly two minutes after the shooting that the officers did not provide him with medical assistance.

Pamela Weiss, an attorney representing the municipality and the three officers, did not respond to voicemails and an email seeking comment. The Anchorage Police Department declined to comment.